

# MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

## Successful CAC Meetings

**T**his section provides CACs with the tools to have a successful CAC meeting. It provides tips for meeting techniques, traps to avoid, and some tricks for getting out of the traps.



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Remember you will lose meeting participants if you meet first to be meeting. Plan carefully to have a productive meeting.

Every meeting should have a purpose, an agenda, and limits.

**Purpose:** Be clear about why the meeting is being held and what is to be accomplished. Never have a meeting for which you have not prepared and that does not have a reason.

**Agenda:** Always have an agenda set out in as much detail as necessary to keep you and your team on track. Make sure minutes are kept to reflect what happened.

**Limit:** Set a date and place for all meetings, but above all set a time limit (for example, 1 hour). Start on time and begin ending the meeting at least 5 minutes before the time limit is up. Starting and ending on time is a golden rule of meetings.

If you remember and apply these three simple rules, you will be practicing the simplest but most difficult leadership behaviors.

### *Set Your Goals*

Meetings should provide members with a sense of accomplishment in a setting that values individuals and encourages maximum participation. Each person should receive an agenda before the meeting that lists the tasks of the meeting and what needs to be accomplished by the time the meeting is over.

## Items to Post at Meetings

### *Group Norms*

All groups must have some basic group rules. These may include the following:

- be on time
- avoid side conversations
- have an agenda with time limits
- have a facilitator (each member can take turns facilitating the group)
- post group norms, agenda, parking lot (see below), and action items
- attain closure on all items
- reach consensus when appropriate

### *Agenda*

Agendas are sent out in a timely manner. Items on the agenda may include:

- name of group
- title of meeting
- name and telephone number of person who called meeting
- date, starting time, place, and ending time
- background materials
- order of agenda items, persons responsible, process and time allocated

### *Parking Lot*

We have all been to meetings where the same subject comes up over and over or where a person wants to talk about something that isn't on the agenda. The parking lot is a wonderful tool to acknowledge that person. The parking lot is a large sheet of paper that you can use to write items that are not on the agenda or items on which you cannot reach consensus. By writing the item on the parking lot, you have acknowledged that it is important and that, if there is time, you will go to the parking lot to discuss the items there. If there is no time during the meeting, you will have a list for future agendas. If the person brings up the subject again, you can point out to the person that you have included it in the parking lot and ask whether the person has any other information to add or is revisiting that item.

### *Action Items/Action Plans*

Action items and action plans give your group a goal or target for the year. These items can include training, fund-raising, community education, and so on. When you list your action items and action plans, include timelines for their completion.



## Group Dynamics

**A**s groups evolve they almost always go through different stages and levels of growth. It is important that group leaders keep group evolution in mind. This section provides some insight into the groups actions and behaviors and allows the group to grow and challenge as it is bound to do.

All groups go through predictable stages of growth and regression. An awareness of the stages of group development is important, particularly for group leaders (see Figure 7).

Figure 7.

**Tuckman's Model of Group Development**

Stage	Behaviors	Expectancy	Issues	Question	Task/Process
I Form (Individual)	Identifying the task Defining ground rules Social relating Giving advice Evaluating self & others	Wide range; extreme variance among group members; very insecure and idealistic	Acceptance & dependency: • Identity in the work group • Testing	Who am I in this group?	Low task/ low process
II Storm (Collection of individuals)	Conflict & hostility (overt or covert) Dominance by a few Attacking the leader	Very low, with little variance	Communication & goal alignment: • Intergroup conflict • Goals & objectives clarification	Who am I with others in this group?	Low task/ high process
III Norm (Group)	Increased tolerance of others Development of harmony Conflict avoided Increased mutual support, trust & communication Development of cohesion	Very high, with little variance; euphoric	Assignment and group cohesion: • Describing action steps to accomplish goals & objectives • Interdependency & consensual validation	How and what are we going to do?	Medium task/ high process
IV Perform (Team)	Effective problem solving with creativity Emergence of solutions, insights & collaboration Understanding of personal and interpersonal processes Constructive self-changes occur	High, stable, and realistic	Monitoring and intervention: • Adoption of functional roles • Effectiveness, efficiency and creativity	How do we accomplish and maintain effectiveness and efficiency?	High task/ low process or high process (fluctuates with group needs)



### ***Tuckman's Model of Group Development***

Tuckman (1965) summarized the results of more than 50 studies into the following four-stage model:

- Stage I: Form, characterized by testing and dependence
- Stage II: Storm, characterized by intrateam conflict
- Stage III: Norm, characterized by the development of team cohesion
- Stage IV: Perform, characterized by acceptance of roles and purposeful activity

#### ***Stage I: Form***

During Stage I, team members discover what behaviors are acceptable to the group. For newly established groups, this stage is the transition from individual to member status. For teams with new leadership, mission, or members, this stage is a period of testing behavior and dependence on formal or informal group leadership for guidance in a new, unstructured environment. This stage is characterized by:

- attempts to identify tasks in terms of relevant parameters and to decide how the group will accomplish the tasks
- decisions on the type of information needed and how it will be used
- hesitant participation
- tests of behavioral expectations and ways to handle behavioral problems
- feelings of initial attachment to the team
- intellectualizing
- discussions of symptoms or problems peripheral to the task
- complaints about the organizational environment
- suspicion, fear, and anxiety about the new situation
- minimal work accomplishment

#### ***Stage II: Storm***

During Stage II, team members become hostile or overzealous as a way to express their individuality and resist group formation. Members recognize the demands of the task and respond emotionally to the perceived requirements for self-change and self-denial. Other characteristics of this stage may include:

- infighting, defensiveness, and competition
- establishment of unachievable goals
- disunity, increased tension, and jealousy

## Problem Behaviors and Possible Treatments

The following treatments are suggestions only. There may be others, so you may want to expand your list as you go.

### **Behavior #1: Passive Listener**

Possible treatments:

- pose direct questions to person
- assign specific jobs or assignments
- delegate responsibility to person

### **Behavior #2: Devil's Advocate**

Possible treatments:

- ask member to justify arguments and objections
- do not allow criticism of ideas or actions without an accompanying alternative
- make member feel like a part of the group by assigning present actions, etc.

### **Behavior #3: Defensive, Ready to Fire**

Possible treatments:

- go out of your way to make members feel comfortable
- encourage group to be accepting of all ideas and points of view

### **Behavior #4: Wise Owl, Know-It-All**

Possible treatments:

- assign research on new tool or technique
- delegate authority as appropriate
- openly discuss behavior on an individual basis (explain effect on group)

### **Behavior #5: Uninterested, Detached**

Possible treatments:

- assign person to be recorder
- ask direct questions
- pair person with more active member on some task

### **Behavior #6: Meditator, Out of Touch**

Possible treatments:

- encourage member to express the ideas he or she is pondering
- assign person to be recorder
- involve person in a coordinating function (e.g., data collecting)

### **Behavior #7: Never Says Anything**

Possible treatments:

- pose direct questions you know the person is capable of answering (in case fear is what keeps the person quiet)
- ask person for opinions (be sure to always encourage group acceptance)



**Behavior #8: Hostile and Angry**

Possible treatments:

- allow other group members to express reactions to the person (often other group member can easily affect behavior—do not allow violence to erupt)
- have private conversation with the person
- involve member constructively

**Behavior #9: Constantly Volunteering and Contributing**

(assuming contribution is not always appropriate or valuable)

Possible treatments:

- divide tasks to be accomplished equally among team members
- assign member to be team recorder
- recognize and reinforce valuable contributions to group activity

**Behavior #10: Bored (outwardly)**

Possible treatments:

- ask person for opinions, contributions
- acknowledge those who behave in a positive manner
- determine an area of interest to the person and assign a related task

**Behavior #11: Clown, Always Joking**

Possible treatments:

- ignore clowning behavior so that group will be encouraged to do the same
- direct serious, group-related questions toward the person
- if necessary, meet with the person to discuss the behavior and its effect on the group

**Behavior #12: Member Often Misses Meetings**

Possible treatments:

- discuss the reasons for the absences with the member, some scenarios are listed below

If the reason is ...

then ...

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • management will not provide time to attend  | • discuss situation with management; you may need to replace that member      |
| • member does not feel he or she has the knowledge to contribute to the group (assuming this is true)     | • consider sending member to training to bolster confidence                   |
| • member does not feel he or she has the knowledge to contribute to the group (assuming this is not true) | • encourage member to attend; assign task you are sure the person can do well |

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- member has personality conflict with another member
- member is not comfortable with the way you lead the group
- assure member you will do what you can to minimize problems and foster good relationships; perhaps a group social function planned by the two members who don't get along would do
- discuss reservations and consider suggestions; if criticisms are valid, then plan for changes and encourage member to attend (you must keep an open mind); if criticisms are not valid, then discuss them and, if necessary, encourage member to leave the group

Situations will need to be dealt with on an individual basis. Good judgment is your best guide.



## Icebreakers

### *What are icebreakers?*

Icebreakers are activities used by the group leader to focus the energy and attention of team members in meetings or training sessions.

### *When do we use them?*

We use icebreakers whenever the group leader feels they would be useful, such as after new information is presented to the group, after a particularly difficult meeting, or when the group needs to renew its energy.

### *Why do we use them?*

Icebreakers are useful ways to:

- introduce people to one another
- break down interpersonal barriers between people
- focus the attention of group members on a common task
- provide a common experience as a base for learning



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### *How do we use them?*

Because icebreakers take many different forms, the procedures for use will depend on the specific icebreaker being used. On the following pages are several different examples of icebreakers and recommendations on how to use them. Choose the icebreaker best suited for your group, and have a good time!

### *Brainteasers*

Each block represents a saying or well-known phrase. This icebreaker works well as a transparency when it is used with a large group. Use Worksheets 14 and 15 in Appendix A to make your transparencies.



# MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

## Brainteaser 1

1 POCHICKENT POCHICKENT POCHICKENT POCHICKENT	2 <b>ECAP</b> <b>PACE</b>	3 <b>GUN, JR.</b>	4 <del>PARKED</del>
5 <b>CHECK</b> <b>CHECKCHECK</b>	6 <i>Heaven</i> <u>— Pennies</u>	7 C O U N T R Y C O U N T R Y	8 <b>CRmWD</b>
9 <b>DANGER</b>	10 <b>fishing</b> <b>C</b>	11 <b>B</b> <b>A E</b> <b>DUMR</b>	12 TAKE 1 MEAL TAKE 1 MEAL TAKE 1 MEAL TAKE 1 MEAL
13 V I O L E T S	14 <b>ROAD</b>	15 PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP PEP	16 <b>agb</b>



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### Solutions to Brainteaser 1:

- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. A chicken in every pot | 9. Topless dancer              |
| 2. Pace back and forth    | 10. Deep-sea fishing           |
| 3. Son of a gun           | 11. Bermuda Triangle           |
| 4. Double-parked          | 12. Take one before every meal |
| 5. Check and double-check | 13. Shrinking violets          |
| 6. Pennies from heaven    | 14. Middle of the road         |
| 7. Cross country          | 15. Full of pep                |
| 8. A face in a crowd      | 16. A mixed bag                |

**Brainteaser 2**

1  <b>night fly</b>	2  He's/Himself	3  r o rail d	4  Shape  or Ship
5 T TROUBLE T R O U B L E I'M R O U B L E E TROUBLE E	6  Y FIREWORKS	7  L D BRIDGE	8  F I D D L E R
9  K PAC <del>X</del>	10  DANC T E S C ETNO	11  LO OSE	12  MAN BOARD
13  SOUP	14  WEAR LONG	15  R/E/A/D/I/N/G	16  LE VEL

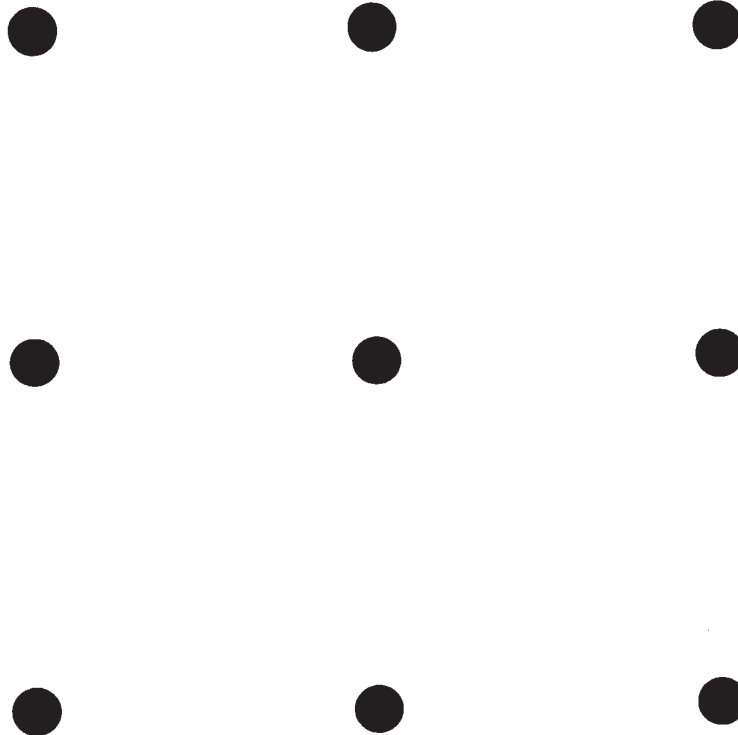
**Solutions to Brainteaser 2:**

- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Fly by night              | 9. Change of pace             |
| 2. He's beside himself       | 10. Square dance contest      |
| 3. Railroad crossing         | 11. Loose at both ends        |
| 4. Shape up or ship out      | 12. Man overboard             |
| 5. I'm surrounded by trouble | 13. Split pea soup            |
| 6. Fourth of July fireworks  | 14. Long underwear            |
| 7. London Bridge             | 15. Reading between the lines |
| 8. Fiddler on the Roof       | 16. Split level               |

## MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

### *Nine-Dot Activity*

Can you cross all nine dots in this drawing with only four straight lines, without lifting your pencil from the paper, and without retracing any of the lines you have drawn? Use Worksheet 16 in Appendix A to make copies for your group.



## MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

### ***Acronym Daze***

This is to be a cooperative effort. Work together with your partner to fill in the words that the letters stand for. Fill in as many as you can.

Use Worksheet 17 in Appendix A to make copies for your group.

SELPA

CCR

CSPDAC

CAC

IEP

SECACNOC

CCS

DIS

IHE

CDE

APE

SDC

RSP

-- RC\*

LDA

RCC



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\* Insert your regional center's initials here.

## MEETINGS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

### Solutions to Acronym Daze

SELPA – Special education local plan area

CCR – Coordinated compliance review

CSPDAC – Comprehensive system of personnel development advisory committee

CAC – Community advisory committee

IEP – individualized education program

SECACNOC – Special Education Community Advisory Committee Network of California

CCS – California Children Services

DIS – Designated instruction and services

IHE – Institute of higher education

CDE – California Department of Education

APE – Adaptive physical education

SDC – Special day class

RSP – Resource specialist program

\_\_RC – Your regional center's name

LDA – Learning disabilities association

RCC – Regional coordinating council



### ***Famous People with Disabilities***

This icebreaker can be used at lengthy meetings or training sessions.

**DIRECTIONS:** Write the names of the famous people on self-adhesive name tags and place one on each person's back. Each person must guess which famous person he or she is only by asking questions that can be answered "yes" or "no."

#### **Learning Disabled**

1. Winston Churchill
2. Tom Cruise
3. Greg Louganis
4. Cher
5. Nelson Rockefeller
6. Albert Einstein
7. Danny Glover

#### **Hearing Impaired**

1. Thomas Edison
2. Beethoven
3. Marlee Matlin
4. Linda Bove
5. Lou Ferrigno

#### **Mentally Ill**

1. James Taylor
2. Patty Duke

#### **Vision Impaired**

1. Stevie Wonder
2. Jose Feliciano
3. Ray Charles
4. Ronnie Milsap
5. John Milton

#### **Deaf/Blind/Mute**

Helen Keller

#### **Physically Disabled**

1. Franklin D. Roosevelt
2. Jere Jewell
3. Emperor Claudius
4. Christy Brown (My Left Foot)
5. Bree Walker (local - San Diego)
6. Jim Abbott

#### **Hemophiliacs**

Tzar Nicholas

#### **Persons with Down Syndrome**

Chris Burke



### ***Birth Line***

**DIRECTIONS:** People line up according to where they were born in relationship to the place where your meeting is being held. The person born closest to the meeting place would be first, followed by the others, until everyone is lined up, closest to farthest.

## Open Meeting Laws

### *CACs Discussing the Issues*

It is important to clarify the facts regarding open meeting practices of school district boards and public advisory and policy-making committees. The following was written to encourage greater public involvement in government. Portions of the Ralph M. Brown Act, which legislatively addresses and answers numerous CAC questions, are included as Appendix C. Even though the Brown Act is commonly known as the central mandate regarding open meeting laws, other policies and laws also deserve our attention. We encourage you to use the resource list below to further your own study of what parents, citizens, CACs, and school district boards can do to successfully encourage public access and participation.

### *Applying the Law*

Our nation's government is based on simple yet unique principles. All citizens have the constitutional right to know and understand the activities at every level of public government. Citizens have the right to approach public officials with requests, concerns, questions, and opinions. We have the right to participate in the democratic process.

The stakes are high. Our schools have a tremendous influence over the personal happiness and future productivity of millions of school-age children in our state. And even though school board members have a major responsibility toward this end, they cannot improve schools and implement the survival of the educational system without the support and assistance of the citizens and the community as a whole.

Often citizens complain about subtle tactics used to prevent their attendance at open school board meetings or their right to air their concerns or wishes directly to a school board. Changing the minds of school board members who consistently resist public involvement is a difficult task. However, informing school board members who are truly confused about their legal responsibilities is much easier.

Open communication works for everyone's benefit. When citizens are listened to, and when citizens hear the concerns and constraints of a school board, service to students becomes "our mutual best interests."

We encourage everyone to become better informed regarding this entire process. After all, one aspect of the CAC design is to make annual recommendations to the governing school board—in essence, to serve this same school board in an advisory capacity. Most CACs throughout our state take this charge seriously and often experience frustration when performing this duty. Our response to this frustration is this document, our continued commitment toward improving CAC and school board relationships by distributing accurate information, and, most importantly, constantly reminding ourselves of the freedom on which this nation is fundamentally based.



# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

## Importance of Communication

**T**he most important thing that CACs do is communicate. They communicate with parents, professionals, administrators, politicians, and anyone else having anything to do with helping them to meet their goals. The information described in this section can be very useful in determining the needs of your membership particularly in the way the members of your group interact with each other.

**CAC**  
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### *Communication Hints for Parents from the Professional's Viewpoint*

A professional has chosen to be in this field, has had the education and often the experience in how to assist you, and wants to help you. When parents call a professional, they should keep in mind the following:

- The professional wants to be fair to all.
- Although the professional is responsible for knowing about the community resources and services that will assist you, the professional cannot know everything.
- Even when professionals want to help, they sometimes may disagree with you on the best solution to a problem. When you can, negotiate a resolution to a problem. When you can negotiate a resolution without becoming angry, you greatly increase the chances of maintaining a good working relationship while arriving at a mutually agreed upon solution.

Parents and professionals must continually develop good parent-professional collaboration skills (working together for the benefit of the individual with disabilities). Keep in mind that it is natural and acceptable that people sometimes become angry. Those who channel their anger into productive energy, however, are the ones who attain positive results.



### ***Communication Hints for Professionals from the Parent's Viewpoint***

Keep in mind that parents attend meetings for many different reasons, including the following:

- confused by all the rules and regulations
- frustrated and vulnerable for having to ask for help when they're used to handling matters themselves
- anxious about requesting a service or about whether they will qualify
- overwhelmed by a new dilemma in their life that they have to cope with
- insecure, unsupported, and isolated

To help ensure mutual understanding and good communication, professionals should consider the following suggestions:

- If possible, review pertinent information that will make the call more personal.
- Explore other community options that can be used.
- Listen more. Make certain you understand the person's statements.
- Remember that you can empower people by including them in the problem-solving experience.



### ***Parent and Professional Roles for Successful Communication***

#### **Parent Roles**

Collaborate with professionals  
Give information and support  
Suggest resources  
Share your knowledge  
Let go of guilt  
Bring your expertise  
Be open to learning  
Give support to and value  
the professional  
Listen to professionals  
Recognize your own  
emotional crisis  
Take care of yourself

#### **Professional Roles**

Collaborate with parents  
Give information and support  
Suggest resources  
Share your knowledge  
Don't add to parental guilt  
Bring your expertise  
Be open to learning  
Give support to and value  
the parent  
Listen to parents  
Recognize your own  
emotional crisis  
Take care of yourself

## Qualities of a Collaborator

**P**arents and professionals often experience the same kinds of feeling toward one another during meetings, such as frustration, anger, helplessness, insecurity, and tension. A real partnership can develop if those feelings can be shared openly. Effective collaborators have certain attitudes and skills that enhance their ability to work successfully with others. A collaborator has self-confidence, values self-awareness and growth as a continuous process, is open to other perspectives, has a clear set of values and is assertive in expressing them, is able to tolerate ambiguous situations, is flexible, is able to negotiate in conflict situations, has good helping and communication skills, and understands group processes and dynamics.

**Figure 8.**  
**Self-Assessment**

Rank your skills as a collaborator on the continuum below. Please circle the number in each category that best matches your skill level.					
	Needs Improving		Adequate		Well Developed
1. I am self-confident.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I know my strengths and weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I make a conscious effort to improve my skills.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am open to differences (cultures, personalities, ideas).	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a clear set of values.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am assertive in expressing my values.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am self-directed.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am interdependent (cooperative yet independent).	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have a system perspective, looking at the whole picture (family, community, society).	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am able to tolerate ambiguous situations.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am flexible.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have good observation skills.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am able to negotiate in conflict situations.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I possess good communication skills.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I like to help others.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I understand group process and dynamics.	1	2	3	4	5
My two strongest skills are:	Two skills I need to improve are:				
1.	1.				
2.	2.				



### ***Collaboration Skills***

If you have all these skills at your command but are unaware that they are to be used while collaborating, your collaboration skills suffer. There are many people who have this list of skills in their repertoire of abilities, but they are not good collaborators because something inhibits their use of these skills. This is like the new cook who has all the necessary ingredients in the pantry for making the perfect cake but can't do so because he or she doesn't know which of the ingredients to use.

If you do not have one or more of these skills, acquire them. If you have these skills, become familiar with their use in collaboration and become a good collaborator by using them wisely. Professional excellence requires collaborative skills.

Figure 9 provides an example of the skills needed to become a good collaborator.

**Figure 9.**  
**Collaborative Skills**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
(Ego, healthy sense of self with good self-esteem)	(Usable facts and information)	(Ability to perform)
Is self-confident	Can list own strengths and weaknesses	Speaks assertively
Is open and tolerant of differences	Has a sense of self	Has negotiation skills
Is interdependent	Has broad systems perspective and knowledge of how systems function	Has communication skills
Tolerates ambiguity	Is aware of and can identify basic types and temperaments	Makes efforts to improve skills
Is flexible		Facilitates group process and dynamics
Offers mutual respect		Has problem-solving skills
Desires to work with others		Has leadership skills Openly acknowledges and considers the point of view of others Risks honesty in conversation

## Strategies for Dealing with Professionals and the System

### *Understanding Professionals*

1. Remember that a professional is someone who has chosen to provide services of a particular nature in exchange for payment. If this exchange is to be truly useful, the professional needs to be a resource.
2. Remember that professionals tend to be trained into specific orientations or schools of thought within their profession. Ask them to be explicit about their particular orientation.
3. When access to a professional is difficult:
  - discuss with the professional your respective expectations regarding access
  - if you want to speak directly to the professional, ask the person acting as intermediary to simply have the professional call you; don't give any further explanation
  - if you're having difficulty getting the professional's time, take the initiative and request to meet by a certain date; specify how much time you think you'll need
4. When you suspect that you are not being involved in decisions:
  - let the professional(s) know that you want to be and expect to be involved
  - anticipate decisions that will need to be made and request to be involved
  - if no alternatives are given to the preferred decision, ask the professional(s) to provide alternatives or seek advice from other professionals regarding alternatives, or both
5. When you suspect that a professional is trying to out-talk you by using technical language or information, place the responsibility back on the professional to help you understand what is being said.
6. When you suspect that a professional is trying to put you on the defensive, ignore those comments that you can and otherwise keep the discussion focused on current or future needs and responsibilities.
7. Where you are dealing with two or more professionals at the same time, be as involved and well-informed as possible.



### *Knowing the System*

1. Discover the information resources in your area.
2. Know the eligibility criteria, programs, and service philosophies of all relevant agencies in your area.
3. Be persistent, systematic, and well-organized in your approach to learning the system.
4. Keep informed about the system's activities on behalf of you, your children, or the families in your area.
5. Be persistent in your efforts to encourage the system to respond to the unique needs of your area.

6. Respect and reinforce the view of others, respect uniqueness and individuality.
7. If your concerns are not resolved within the system, develop a strategy for applying pressure by first identifying:
  - the issue(s)
  - the focus or target of the pressure
  - the type of approach (political, legal, public) to be used

### ***How to Begin***

1. Seek out and explore groups and publications related to your interests and needs.
2. When gathering information:
  - begin by talking with people you know, both professionals and nonprofessionals
  - find out whether there are information resources (such as telephone information services or directories) in the community and use them
  - develop a list of knowledgeable and helpful people who can provide you with accurate information
3. Be well informed.
4. Keep a record of all contacts with professionals or agencies. Include the date and type of contact, the person's name and title, and a summary of the important points.
5. Keep copies of all information you generate (such as correspondence).



## Communication Skills

**E**ach person chooses, consciously or subconsciously, to behave and communicate in different ways in different situations and relationships. Those styles of communication are learned behaviors that can be grouped into the categories of assertiveness, aggressiveness, and passiveness. There are four barriers to assertive communication:

1. Lack of ability to discriminate between assertive, aggressive, and passive communication.
2. Lack of ability to intellectually and emotionally accept your personal rights.
3. Lack of self-assured personal messages.
4. Lack of skills.

Each communication style has different behavioral characteristics and effects on us and on our relationships with others. (See Worksheets 18 and 19 for further information on assertiveness.)

### ***Being Assertive—In a Nutshell***

by Florene Stewart Poyadue, Parents Helping Parents, San Jose, California.



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#### **1. KISS—Keep It Short and Simple**

Most of the time, we keep talking until we put both feet in our mouth. It is very powerful to just state it, shut up, and let silence do its work.

#### **2. PERSIST**

The first “no” is often just an introduction for a need for more information. Perhaps the person with whom you are dealing doesn’t have the authority to say yes. You will need to persist to get to that person. It’s the early bird that gets the worm and the buzzard that keeps circling that gets his needs met.

#### **3. REPEAT**

“I can understand what a hard day you are having, but I need to see the manager.” “I can imagine a lot of people return these unworkable pens, and I need to see the manager.” Become a broken record. If they haven’t responded properly to what you said, apparently there has been a failure to communicate.

#### **4. AVOID INSULTING OR ATTACKING**

This prevents a negative reaction to you or your request. The best way to avoid insulting and/or attacking is to avoid starting sentences with “you.” Another way to remember this rule is: All sentences started with “you” should be completed with a compliment. People take “you” very personally. Compliments taken personally help build relationships. Remember, most of the time you are not angry with the person; you are angry with the system in which that person works. Be firm but friendly—you might gain an ally.

## **5. OVERUSE "I THINK" AND "I FEEL"**

### **6. I AGREE, BUT**

Find common ground, agreeing whenever you can when discussing or negotiating. State openly the things with which you agree that people have brought up. Also, feel free to add a "but" if that is needed. Negotiation methods are usually in order in assertive communication, because negotiation means a win-win situation (both parties leave the table feeling satisfied). Assertiveness itself means that the person speaking up cares enough about himself not to let others abuse or walk all over him/her, while still being aware of the other people's feelings and needs (win-win).

### **7. I DISAGREE, BUT**

Equally useful. Also "I disagree" and "I beg to differ."



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### **8. AVOID DETOURS**

Simply state, "That's not the point." "That is not what we are discussing here." Stay focused. Keep your main ideas, your goals, what your bottom line is, what can't be accepted or changed, and what can be accepted or changed written in large letters before you on a piece of paper, if necessary. "I am sorry, but we were talking about. . . ."

### **9. DEFINE YOURSELF—DO NOT CONSTANTLY DEFEND YOURSELF**

Others talking: "You're defensive." You talking: "No, right now what I am is concerned." Or, simply, "No, I am concerned." Others talking: "You're emotional." You talking: "I am angry."

Sometimes it's fine and even helpful to agree. "Heck, yes, I am emotional—this is my child you are talking about. When I or you don't get emotional when major decisions about our children are being made, that's time for concern." Admitting it can have a calming and winning effect.

### **10. ASK FOR SPECIFIC DETAILS**

"In what ways do you see my child as severely abusive?" "Give me some specific examples of his rude behavior." (Who knows, maybe you as the parent understand his/her motives, and perhaps being rude was the farthest thing from his/her mind.) Have them give specifics if they are describing your child's behavior, manner, and so on.

### **11. GATHER FACTS AND INFORMATION**

Knowledge is power; it helps build confidence and self-esteem, a look and feel of quality and ability.



**12. DRESS IN CLOTHES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE A KING OR QUEEN**

Wear clothes in which you are comfortable, clothes socially appropriate for the occasion, and/or clothes that the other person respects.

**13. WRITE, PLAN, REHEARSE**

Practice what you want to say. Go over it with an enemy, friend, or devil's advocate.

**14. LEARN FROM THE TIMES YOU ARE NOT ASSERTIVE**

Learn from the "Oh, I should have said. . . ." Go ahead and figure out what you should have said and say it the next time. There will be a next time and you will be great!

**15. WATCH IT**

Be aware of what the other people are doing with what they are saying. What kind of action or reaction are they trying to cause in you? By being aware, you can cut your response to what you want and keep your wits about you. They are usually trying to throw you off guard, upset you, distract you from the issues, and so on.



If they:

- Belittle your statement—Simply state: "Oh, I see you don't see this as very important. That's too bad, maybe you need more information."
- Deny your statement—Repeat the above phrases.
- Blame the problems on you—Direct the discussion toward what you feel to be the problem.
- Analyze you—Ask for details.
- Give a lengthy, complicated explanation—Say: "Sounds interesting, but. . . ."
- Transfer problem to someone else—Say: "Since (Jim) isn't here to defend himself, let's stick to ourselves or what we have here."

**16. TRY IT, YOU WILL LIKE IT**

Being assertive is its own reward. It gets easier with every usage.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



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## CAN WE TALK?

### PARENTS & PROFESSIONALS WORKING TOGETHER

1. The goal for this handbook and guide is to be a source of information which will help your child and family.
2. We would like to de-mystify the special education programs, the process of qualifying for special education, and the alternative programs available to challenged students.
- 3. Parents involved in the Special Education process often have questions and concerns that cannot be answered or resolved at the IEP meeting. How many of us on the way to the car after an important and stressful meeting have been heard to remark "I wish I would have said \_\_\_\_", or "Why didn't I ask \_\_\_\_?"
4. When questions are left unanswered and concerns not expressed, the very essence of what we stand for in Special Education is being ignored.
5. We want to work in true collaborative relationships with parents. These voluntary relationships are based on trust, respect, and the willingness of both partners to work toward mutual goals. Collaboration does not happen overnight. Trust and respect are not on a timeline like IEP development, nor are collaborative relationships mandated - yet they are the "Spirit of the Law" that guides our work together.
6. Searching for information regarding services for your children can be exhausting. Hopefully this handbook and guide will help. If you feel your child might qualify for special services, please contact the special education office for further help.

